

Networks to Ask White House for New TV Policy

By JACK GOULD

Representatives of the three television networks will appeal to the White House today for more time to prepare for appearances by President Johnson.

News officials of the American Broadcasting Company, Columbia Broadcasting System and National Broadcasting Company plan to explain to George E. Reedy, White House press secretary, that the President's predilection to making addresses and announcements on short notice may be costing him maximum public attention as well as posing procedural problems for the TV industry.

A meeting between the network officials and Mr. Reedy was arranged over a week ago, but it assumed new importance after the President went on the air on Sunday evening in a half-hour speech on the Dominican Republic crisis.

Plans for Mr. Johnson's address were uncertain during much of the early part of the evening and he was finally carried live only on the C.B.S. network.

Earlier Problems

Last Wednesday the President was seen live only on the N.B.C. network in a statement for which there was reportedly firm advance notice of less than 15 minutes.

On Monday evening a week ago the President hurriedly arranged to speak shortly after 7 P.M., a time that coincided with the regular evening newscasts of Walter Cronkite of C.B.S. and David Brinkley and Chet Huntley of N.B.C.

The TV networks also were alerted to the possibility of a Presidential appearance last Saturday night, it was learned, but the President did not make the telecast.

He has available a television studio that was installed in the White House at the request of the networks. The studio is manned virtually around-the-clock.

On one occasion, it was reported, the President took to the air so quickly that there was not time for the one-minute

display of the Presidential Seal. The seal serves as a cue for the networks and individual stations to make the switch to Washington and to allow for introduction of the President.

The networks at today's meeting will stress that they recognize the prerogative of the President to handle his relations with the news media according to his own taste and to be the sole judge of when he believes it is necessary to address the nation.

But the TV executives will inform Mr. Reedy that they had agreed informally that by not apprising the public of his appearances in advance President Johnson was inviting competition from theatrical attractions and was losing the attention of viewers who might not know he was on the air.

\$150,000 a Half-Hour

Pre-emptions of a regular commercial program can involve a loss of revenue running as high as \$150,000 for a half-hour. Unscheduled news programs have been an increasingly large expense to TV.

A particularly costly form of pre-emption is one that involves cancellation of an hour's program to accommodate a half-hour special presentation.

To carry the President on Sunday night, C.B.S. pre-empted "Candid Camera" in the Eastern section of the country, part of the Ed Sullivan show in the Middle West and "Lassie" on the West Coast.

N.B.C. proceeded with its scheduled attraction, "The Rogues," at 10 o'clock, but interrupted the program for news bulletins read by an announcer. N.B.C. carried the full speech on film at 11:15. The network said yesterday it believed it had followed a sound journalistic course.

There was some speculation in TV circles that the President might purposely have waited until 10 o'clock to avoid appearing at the same time as "Bonanza," the most popular show on the air, which N.B.C. carries during the preceding hour on Sunday nights.

In the background of the re-

lationship between the White House and the television networks is the question of how decisions are made on whether a Presidential address or statement is seen live, on a delayed basis or is reported as part of a regular newscast.

The White House has two alternative courses in notifying the networks that the President wishes to speak.

It can make an official request for time; such a request is viewed as a Presidential order and is honored automatically. In that case there can be negotiation over the hour that the President will speak or the President can fix the time to suit himself.

The second course is for the White House to announce that the President will speak on an important matter but not make an official request, the procedure that was followed on Sunday.

Sunday Volunteers Scarce

Under Sunday's procedure, network officials, who may not know the contents of the speech must decide whether it should be covered live or can be deferred. On Sunday evening the networks did not volunteer time and the President reportedly delayed his appearance in hope that they would.

At today's meeting with Mr. Reedy it is believed that the networks will note that the sudden scheduling of White House statements and speeches, except in emergencies, does not permit viewers to be notified in advance of a Presidential appearance. The networks are also expected to contend that uncertainty over the length of a speech, its subject matter and its time of presentation handicaps orderly planning.

A matter receiving informal discussion in TV industry circles is whether a succession of abrupt announcements within a few days may not detract from the effectiveness of the format in emergencies.

But it was also argued that a Presidential decision to take to the airwaves constituted in itself an automatic measure of the importance of a speech or

statement. So far, it was observed, every TV appearance by the President has been major front-page news.

On Sunday night President Johnson's prompting device caused trouble when a page of his speech that he had already read reappeared on the machine. He repeated himself until the speech was put in proper continuity.

The prompting device is attached to the camera—an arrangement that precludes any substantial variation in camera perspective during a speech.

If the camera backs away from the President to achieve a change from a close-up view, it becomes more difficult for the President to read the words appearing on the prompting machine.